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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 481st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 23 September 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Ecuador (continued) (CRC/C/3/Add.44; HRI/CORE/1/Add.7; CRC/C/Q/ECU/1; written replies of the Government of Ecuador to the questions raised in the list of issues)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Ecuador resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. GALLEGOS CHIRIBOGA (Ecuador), replying to three questions by Ms. Palme, said that he knew of no restriction on freedom of association of children or anyone else in Ecuador, where it was a fundamental right. Secondly, children filing complaints to the appropriate organs were assisted by the children's ombudsman. Over 30 NGOs were also active in that field, in addition to associations of university students of law, medicine and sociology, and, obviously, the social-worker network under the Juvenile Court, as well as the Ecuadorian medical system of the Ministry of Health. Ecuador's legal system endowed each city, town or parish with a political representative, who was basically in charge of local administration of justice. The idea was for the national child welfare system to be linked locally through the town halls within a decentralized system. Thirdly, regarding corporal punishment, he referred the Committee to paragraph 84 of Ecuador's written replies, where mention was made of the National Office for the Protection of Pupils under the education system. There was also a Disciplinary System against Abuse in Detention and Correction Centres. Strenuous efforts were being deployed to eradicate corporal punishment, which was linked to a tradition of educational discipline not specific to Ecuador. A series of programmes were being sponsored by the National Institute for Children and the Family (INFAA), in particular the Programme of Citizen's Action for Children. He referred Committee members to question 15 of the List of issues and paragraphs 79-89 of the written replies. As he had previously explained, corporal punishment in educational establishments was punishable by law. Further details with regard to Mrs. Ouedraogo's question concerning children born out of wedlock could be found on page 21 of the written replies, which spelled out the constitutional provisions in that regard. They included equal rights and opportunities, so that no legal stigma attached to such children and they did not suffer discrimination. Such obligations had long existed in the legislation. There was also the National Social Development Plan, which sought to consolidate the home as the place of a child's ultimate protection to reduce unwanted pregnancies, and to eradicate illiteracy, the implication being that the higher women's educational level, the fewer unwanted pregnancies there would be.

3. Replying to Mrs. Sardenberg, he said that, according to the statistics provided in paragraph 134 of the written replies, the indirect beneficiaries of bilingual intercultural education stood at 750,000 men, women and children, as a result of State investment worth 38,127,627,000 sucres in that type of education, imparted by 5,095 teachers in 1,800 schools in 15 of the country's 22 provinces, a situation of which Ecuador could be proud. He had been unable as yet to obtain statistics on the suicide rates within families, although the overall suicide rate was relatively low.

4. Responding to another question by Mrs. Sardenberg, he said that Ecuador was striving to eliminate employment of children as domestics. Under Ecuadorian legislation, domestic employment was subject to the usual social security requirements, work inspections and so on. While the use of children as domestic labour was prohibited by law, it did exist in certain traditional sectors, especially rural areas, where children undertook domestic service to add to family income.

5. Replying to Mrs. Mokhuane, he referred the Committee to paragraph 12 of the written replies, where mention was made of the efforts of the Technical Secretariat of the Social Front, which included establishment of the "SÍ NIÑEZ" specialized system of indicators for children, coordinated with UNICEF and INFAA as part of the Comprehensive System of Social Indicators. The data available stemmed from specific studies on, for instance, sexual abuse and child labour, the results of which were contained in document CRC/C/3/Add.44. One important factor was the differing definition of the English term "abuse" in Spanish and English. The topic had been dealt with in paragraph 59 of the written replies, which listed the National Social Development Plan's activities with its Policies for Children aimed at greater interaction between the State and civil society in paragraph 79, which referred to the Abused Child Care Networks; and in paragraphs 90 to 92, which referred to the explicit prohibition of corporal punishment under the Constitution, the Law against Violence to Women and the Family, and the Children's Code in connection with abuse in institutions and at school.

6. Another question from Mrs. Mokhuane concerned the education of disabled children. A series of contingency programmes were in place to integrate such children into the educational process. Education policies had been implemented, enabling them to participate in normal life, especially student life, although obviously more so in urban areas where facilities were more easily accessible. The National Children's Council was the body responsible for following up adoption cases, with the assistance of social workers, who monitored the welfare of adopted children.

7. He was uncertain whether Ecuador's interpretation of child exploitation within the family was the same as that of the Committee. It could refer to children dispatched to work in order to augment the family income, or to street children, who, according to UNICEF statistics, numbered a bare 1,000 in Ecuador, most of whom were sent out to work and returned home. The latter category were the beneficiaries of government policies, including a wide-ranging programme involving INFAA and providing them with education, and their families with assistance. He assured Mrs. Mboi that children born out of wedlock were also supported under those programmes, in addition to a State policy of assistance to them and their mothers, including preventive measures such as formal sex education. The questions concerning Ecuador's efforts to eliminate sexual and corporal abuse had also been covered in his previous answers, and by the written reply to question 19 of the list of issues.

8. With regard to community support, he said that Ecuadorian society placed a high value on community life, based initially on the isolated nature of rural life, but ultimately on the manner in which Ecuadorian society had developed. It was not only evident in traditional community interaction and assistance to children and the elderly provided by, among other institutions,

churches of all denominations, but was also encouraged by established laws. In a combined State/community effort, many infrastructure projects such as road construction, especially in Andean areas, were implemented through the so-called "*minga*" system of work by the entire community, which had extended to the urban areas.

9. In reply to Mr. Kolosov, he said that Article 6 of the Constitution established that sex between an adult and a minor girl - even with the latter's consent - was a punishable offence. In response to Miss Mason's question concerning the treatment of abortion in Ecuadorian law, he explained that it was penalized except in cases of incest or rape. On the subject of children separated from their parents, which Miss Mason had noted on a visit to Cuenca, he explained that many Ecuadorian communities experienced large-scale migration by men who, in order to provide for their families, sought work in the developed countries - often entering them illegally, which prevented them from returning. Given the lack of family reunification programmes, children were effectively deprived of their fathers, and sometimes of their mothers, for economic reasons and not from any desire to abandon them. Ecuador had established a system of communication between migrants and their families, and no restrictions were imposed on money sent from abroad or imports of goods. The Government had also endeavoured to secure legal bilateral agreements with the host countries for exceptions that would enable families to be reunified. A propos of Mr. Rabah's question concerning border immigrants, Ecuador facilitated the entry of spouses and children in the inverse situation of immigration, essentially involving refugees, not only in border areas, but around the country, where there were large nuclei of refugees. Despite Ecuador's own constraints, it welcomed asylum-seekers. Although the numbers involved were not large and did not pose a major problem, Ecuador did accord them special treatment, had signed all the pertinent agreements, and actively supported refugee programmes, including awareness-raising programmes.

10. The CHAIRPERSON explained that her reference to absent fathers had been made in connection with State support under article 27 of the Convention, to help parents provide for their children, to secure the recovery of maintenance, and for the contracting of bilateral or multilateral agreements. That was perhaps not possible in situations of unlawful emigration. However, she wished to know what support the Government provided for children deprived of one or both parents.

11. Mrs. SARDENBERG expressed concern about the employment of children as domestic labour, a common phenomenon in Latin America, which violated many articles of the Convention, frequently involving as it did sexual abuse or denial of the right to education, and increasing the incidence of rape of girls. Such children were often placed with families, in a form of quasi-adoption, but actually in order to work. In the light of the Committee's attempts to establish links between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the situation was a telling example of the fact that discrimination against women began with the abuse of girls. Registration posed a further problem. It had been acknowledged in the written replies that the law was as yet not fully enforced owing, inter alia, to the difficulty of access in rural areas, which resulted in a discrepancy between the numbers of children born and those

registered. Since citizenship began at the moment of registration, that omission could result in serious problems throughout a child's existence, such as document forgery, disappearance and child traffic. In that last regard, despite Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga's reassurances, her sources insisted that the case of the children who had disappeared after being sent to Venezuela was an unsolved crime. She would therefore like to have, immediately or at a later date, any further information and any pertinent documentation on that case, and to know whether it had been solved, whether some or all of the children had been returned, and whether there was any mechanism for cooperation with neighbouring countries in that regard. She recommended Governments to take all measures needed to prevent such crimes and protect children and mothers from a situation that existed in many countries.

12. Turning to inter-country adoption, she applauded the fact that Ecuador had ratified the Hague Convention, which very few States parties had. One problem facing ratification was the designation of a central authority. How had Ecuador solved the problem and which was its central authority?

13. The widespread practice of what could be described as a culture of child abuse in families, schools and within the community was very disturbing. She urged the Government to give further consideration to the issue and to call on non-governmental organizations (such as the Network for the Care of Abused Children), society at large and even international cooperation for assistance in the effort to change such attitudes. The establishment of the Commission for the Eradication of Child Abuse was a step in the right direction, but a more focused, detailed approach was also required.

14. The CHAIRPERSON agreed that in the light of paragraph 84 of the written replies there appeared to be a continuing problem in weaning people away from the view that abuse of children was a normal and acceptable practice.

15. Mr. GALLEGOS CHIRIBOGA (Ecuador) said that paragraph 84 referred only to the situation prevailing up to December 1995. Later action to deal with abuse, in particular the establishment of the Commission for the Eradication of Child Abuse in the School, was described in paragraphs 85-90 of the written replies. It was important to recognize that the authorities were aware of the problem and were taking steps to deal with it.

16. Mrs. QUEDRAOGO said she was still awaiting a reply on two points she had raised previously. She had asked whether the recommendations in the report had been the subject of any discussion, and if so by whom. In relation to adoption, she had asked whether adoption could be ended if a child had problems with the adoptive family and whether an adopted child had any opportunity to find out its former identity.

17. On the issue of child abuse, punishment of children in schools appeared to be condoned by families to the extent that some parents expressly asked teachers to make sure their children were punished properly. What action was being taken to prevent such abuse? Could children lodge complaints against teachers who had violated their rights in that respect? The teaching of human rights in schools should ensure an end to such violations.

18. Ecuador had a good reputation as a country offering asylum to refugees. She asked whether any formal framework or specific procedures existed for the protection of unaccompanied child refugees. Were any official procedures in place to ensure reunification of families where possible?

19. Ms. PALME said that the answer to her earlier question with regard to education for reproductive health had referred only to girls. However, she had also wished to know what was being done to educate boys in that respect. She also considered that it was better to refer to equality, rather than equity, between boys and girls, in view of the considerable discussion of the concept that had taken place at the Beijing Conference.

20. Mr. RABAH, welcoming the information the delegation had provided in relation to the Ombudsman, said he would like to know more about how the institution worked in practice. Were any statistics available on its work, or could any data be provided on the cases brought before it?

21. It was commonly the case throughout the world that children up to the age of about 15 had more leisure time than older children or adults and spent much time in play. Did the education system in Ecuador make any provision for leisure activities for children, in particular for those living in disadvantaged communities with little access to sports facilities, playgrounds or youth clubs?

22. What efforts were being made to ensure participation by children in school life? Did the training given to primary and secondary school teachers include any specific instruction on the rights of the child?

23. Mrs. MBOI said that the problems associated with teenage pregnancies occurring out of wedlock needed to be tackled by promoting adolescent health, and in particular by ensuring the provision of adolescent-friendly reproductive health and family planning services. What special services were available to pregnant teenagers in Ecuador, bearing in mind the fact that such expectant mothers were still children themselves?

24. Another area of concern was the very high incidence of chronic malnutrition in children under the age of five. She asked whether a national nutritional policy existed or if any comprehensive system of measures was in place to combat malnutrition.

25. Mrs. MOKHUANE asked whether any minimum wage had been established for children, in view of the fact that children under 14 years of age were found in the labour market in Ecuador. Had children any opportunity to lodge complaints about the wages paid to them?

26. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO, noting that Ecuador appeared to value education highly, said that the large increase in the school enrolment rate seemed to indicate that access to primary education was satisfactory. However, high repeat and drop-out rates pointed to serious shortcomings in the quality of the education being given. What was the educational reform process doing to overcome those shortcomings?

27. She asked how the Government was coping with the need to provide access to education and school books free of charge and ensure payment of teachers, in view of the macroeconomic problems it faced. Were teenage mothers allowed to continue their education? Did schoolchildren have any opportunity to give their views before adoption of any decisions or sanctions relating to them? What part did parents, especially parents who had had little education themselves, take in the school life of their children?

28. Mr. KOLOSOV said he had some serious concerns with regard to the juvenile justice system and considered a strong recommendation on the subject would be necessary. Paragraph 225 of the report gave evidence of some cynicism on the subject, since it started by stating that minors under the age of 18 were not punishable but concluded by referring to the high rate of unlawful deprivation of freedom. Deprivation of freedom, in whatever institution it took place, should not be the principal means of dealing with young offenders, particularly as there was a backlog of cases and procedures were slow.

29. He asked whether it was still the practice for convicted offenders to keep their children with them in prison up to the age of seven. Even though children might need the presence of their parents, such a period of incarceration seemed excessive. Were there any facilities for such children to attend school in prison, given that the school starting age was six?

30. Ms. PALME, noting that the written replies to question 31 of the list of issues indicated Ecuador's intention to implement the Agenda for Action of the World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Stockholm in 1996, said that some account of the practical measures envisaged to follow up that intent would be welcome. As in many areas of concern to the Committee, Ecuador's intentions were admirable but what the Committee needed to know was how those intentions were being translated into reality. For example corporal punishment was deplored but it was still widely practised in families, institutions and schools. To tackle such problems a realistic step-by-step plan of action was required, as well as continuous monitoring of progress.

31. Mrs. MBOI, referring to the same section of the written replies (paragraph 147), asked what was meant by the statement that there had been partial compliance with the Agenda for Action of the Stockholm Congress. It was important for the Committee to know what actual action had been taken on the ground to give effect to the recommendations.

32. With regard to child labour, the delegation had indicated that the great majority of children at work were boys. However, it often happened that many girls were also at work, although such labour was not openly acknowledged, so that girls rarely appeared in the labour statistics. It would therefore be useful for the Committee to have reliable disaggregated data to show the number of girls employed, not only in domestic work but at all other kinds of work. Furthermore, even though child labour was more common in rural areas, the greater economic deprivation in urban and periurban areas often meant that working conditions and remuneration there were far worse than elsewhere. The Committee would welcome information on what was being done to protect such children.

33. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO asked whether any traditional practices prejudicial to children's health were found in Ecuador, especially among the indigenous population. If so, what was being done to eliminate such practices? She asked whether any steps were being taken to prevent accidents among adolescents and if any statistics on the subject existed.

34. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked what plans had been made with regard to children's health in the coastal areas of the country affected by the El Niño phenomenon. Furthermore, the Committee would appreciate updated statistics on the general health situation in the country. She viewed the decline in the country's health budget with concern, asking what plans the new Government had for the health sector, with particular reference to the health budget. She would also like to have a comprehensive review of the status of children's health.

35. In the educational field, she welcomed the fact that Ecuador had decided to include teaching on human rights in the school curriculum. The right to health and the right to education were both very important and the best way to ensure they were met was to guarantee them under the new Constitution. In relation to the proposed integrated education system, differences in curricula would need to be introduced in different regions and at different social levels to ensure equality of access to education for all children in the country, both boys and girls.

36. Some shortcomings in the comprehensive protection of children in the juvenile justice system were apparent in the 1996 report; as like in many Latin American countries, many children were unlawfully detained not because they had committed any crime but because they lived on the fringe of society. However, since the advent of the new Constitution would no doubt lead to a change in that respect, she would appreciate information on any strategy in place for social rehabilitation.

37. Mr. RABAH said that the report referred to the juvenile justice system in vague terms only and gave no specific information on the subject. He understood from the report that Ecuador had no special children's courts to deal with juvenile offenders, nor were any statistics available on the number of girls and boys convicted of crimes or on the nature of those crimes. Were any forms of alternative punishment for juveniles provided by the law? Was life imprisonment of juveniles prohibited? Were juveniles detained with adults in prison, in particular before being brought to trial? In conclusion, he asked how the rehabilitation centres operated, who were placed there and how such centres were monitored. In view of the fact that, as in most developing countries, the vast majority of juvenile offenders were probably poor, he wondered whether any legal aid was provided for them.

38. The CHAIRPERSON said she was also concerned that although, according to paragraph 225 of the report, the details of the juvenile justice system were set out in the Children's Code, the Committee did not have access to the Code and found many aspects of the matter unclear. She asked whether there was any system of social workers attached to the courts to assist juvenile offenders. She shared Mr. Kolosov's concern in relation to the deprivation of freedom of juveniles.

39. Sex tourism was a growing phenomenon in a number of developing countries. She asked whether it occurred in Ecuador and if so what measures were in place to deal with it or prevent it.

40. Mrs. MOKHUANE asked whether children entering Ecuador in flight from armed conflict were accorded refugee status. Were any subsequent efforts made to integrate such children into Ecuadorian society or did they remain as refugees?

The meeting was suspended at 11.20 a.m. and resumed at 11.40 a.m.

41. Mr. GALLEGOS CHIRIBOGA (Ecuador) said that his Government had taken careful note of the many detailed questions that had been asked and assured the Committee that, where he was unable to respond immediately, the necessary information would be forwarded at a later date.

42. In response to the question by Mrs. Mokhuane regarding children affected by armed conflict, he said that, as a place of refuge, Ecuador was an active participant in the international system for the protection of refugees. An adviser from UNICEF was currently assisting the Government to establish statistics for child refugees escaping from armed conflict in neighbouring countries. Within Ecuador, refugee children were cared for jointly by the State and NGOs, including the Ecuadorian Episcopal Conference.

43. In response to the question by Miss Mason about sex tourism, he said that there was none in Ecuador. There had been one incident in which an Asian man had been deported. The Government was determined not to allow the country to be used by paedophiles for sex purposes.

44. A number of questions had been asked about the provisions of the Children's Code and the detention system. Rules and norms for the custody of child offenders were established by the Code and an integrated system involving the courts, the prisons and the social services worked to take care of child offenders. Many of the details were described in the written reply to question 29 of the list of issues. The entire prison system was currently undergoing reform, in which special arrangements for children would be an important element. The system of justice as a whole was being reviewed and a special effort made to establish an open and humanitarian process in respect of children. Detailed information about the rehabilitation centres for child offenders would be found in the written reply. Statistics were kept of the number of children in custody and would be sent to the Committee as soon as possible. Child offenders and their families were offered psychological support. Help in the reform process was being sought from international agencies and other countries, Sweden, for example. Paragraph 227 of the report gave details of the implementation of a socio-educational model for the rehabilitation of children and adolescents with a view to establishing non-custodial programmes and enhancing social reintegration.

45. A number of questions had been asked about measures to remedy the havoc caused in the coastal area by El Niño. Serious problems had arisen in the five provinces affected by floods and destroyed infrastructure, but measures to prevent the outbreak of disease had been successful. The decentralized nature of the health system had made it possible to deal with local outbreaks

immediately. The whole coastal area was currently undergoing reconstruction, paid for out of international loans and national resources. An autonomous non-bureaucratic structure was in charge of managing the effort to rebuild not just highways and bridges but also schools and hospitals and other public buildings. El Niño had been succeeded by La Niña, which was the opposite phenomenon, likely to cause drought and requiring measures to protect the water supply and other essential services.

46. In reply to Mrs. Ouedraogo's question concerning the existence of religious rituals or indigenous traditions likely to affect the health of the Afro-Ecuadorian community, he could say there were no rituals in Ecuador involving mutilation or other harmful practices, and traditional medicine was based entirely on natural products with generally positive effects.

47. In response to Mrs. Mboi's question about the prostitution of girl children, he said that the National Council for Women had undertaken a study of prostitution of both girls and boys, though the latter was rare, and statistics based on the survey could be provided. The study also took into account the situation of girl domestic workers.

48. In response to Mr. Kolosov's rather sharp criticism, he said that although it was true that some children went to prison with their mothers, the idea was to prevent them being thrown onto the streets or sent to orphanages. The situation, though not ideal, was part of the effort to preserve the family. The whole prison system was geared to rehabilitation rather than punishment. Conjugal visits to prisoners by their husbands or wives were normal in Ecuador, as in other Latin American countries. There was no death penalty or sentencing to life imprisonment. The longest period of incarceration that could be imposed was 16 years. In rehabilitation centres, child offenders were kept separate and did not mix with adults.

49. A number of questions had been asked about education in Ecuador. The education system was integrated and universal. Basically, the problem was that it was now 25 years old. Some constructive changes had been made in response to changing attitudes, dissatisfied with the earlier more formal and traditional approach. As it now stood, the system reached 95 per cent of the children in Ecuador. The basic education curriculum had been revised to cover instruction in human rights and the international instruments guaranteeing them, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Advice had been sought from UNICEF and UNESCO and civil society was encouraged to participate. The Government's aim was to optimize the country's resources. It was recognized that a quality system needed well paid and well trained professional teachers enjoying prospects for advancement through further training. Seventy per cent of the teachers in Ecuador were women.

50. In respect of the link between health and education stressed by Mrs. Sardenberg, he pointed out that 3 million of the country's entire child population of 6 million were enrolled in the so-called "healthful" schools. For children with particular needs, there were a number of special programmes. For example, scholarships were set aside for child workers and school hours were flexible so as to allow them to study as well as work. Child labour was, of course, endemic in the developing countries. Ecuador recognized it as a

major social problem, bound up with the shortage of jobs and with the whole struggle against poverty. Special programmes were also offered for handicapped children, although facilities were better in the towns than in the country. In the rural sector, a tradition tended to persist whereby rural parents hid such children away rather than seek treatment for them. In general, good results were being achieved, some assisted by the World Bank. It might seem contradictory to complain of dwindling resources and at the same time draw attention to new programmes. The answer was that Ecuador had gone into debt precisely in order to deal with the problem of education and to fulfil its undertaking to the people.

51. In response to Mrs. Sardenberg, he said that the Government was clearly anxious about the exploitation of child workers, not least because they filled jobs that should have gone to adult workers. A series of State actions had been undertaken on their behalf. Labour inspectors were constantly at work and officials from the Social Security Institute tried to see that they were properly enrolled in the social security system.

52. Mention had been made of cases of children being handed over by their parents to third parties, who had taken them to work in Venezuela and Spain. That traffic had been investigated and bilateral agreements reached to end the practice. All the children concerned had been repatriated and restored to their families through the efforts of the Ecuadorian consulates in those countries and of a number of NGOs. Civil society in Ecuador condemned all such traffic in persons and the Government had ratified all the relevant conventions. There were cases in which children hired as domestic servants to work in developed countries were forced into sexual servitude. Closer control of such employment was clearly necessary. International adoption also needed to be kept under close supervision. In Ecuador, agreements had been reached with private adoption agencies whereby all details had to be reported to the State. If the child was not happy in his new home, the adoption was suspended. As far as he knew, there had been no instance in which young brides had been bought in Ecuador to be shipped to developed countries. He noted that if an adoption was ended for any reason, the child recovered his former name and identity. Only married couples could adopt children; single people or homosexual couples were not allowed to do so.

53. Corporal punishment as a means of exerting discipline was still widely accepted in Ecuador, but he trusted that ill-treatment of that kind would end with more education. There were already regulations whereby any teacher who physically harmed a child was penalized. The same was true of domestic violence, where there had been a very positive reaction to efforts to end violence against women. Special units for women and children had been set up in some police stations.

54. A question had been asked about the State's response to the problem of children abandoned by migrant parents. Such children were not left to fend for themselves, but it was the local authorities which dealt first with such cases. It was the search for employment that took parents away and the creation of jobs would have a great impact on the problem. State and civil society had to work together to eliminate poverty. In the meantime, it was impossible for the Government to deal with all the problems that arose. Yet

many government programmes were highly effective. With support from international agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), as well as money borrowed abroad, the Government had been able to provide hundreds of thousands of children with school meals and textbooks. There were also health programmes in the schools. Another important feature was the link between the educational system and parents. Schools for parents encouraged participation in decision-making as well as public support for the schools. With the help of the Inter-American Development Bank, 110,000 teachers had been trained in the last year alone. The level of education was constantly improving and the better integration of the health, education and social services systems under the new Constitution would enable still further progress to be made. Many Ecuadorians went on to secondary school and university after their 10 years of compulsory primary education. Women in particular were well represented in higher education and in the areas of employment to which it gave access, especially the financial sector.

55. The Government had allocated tens of millions of dollars, representing particularly large sums in the Ecuadorian context, to many dozens of projects to alleviate the problems engendered by poverty.

56. He had been instructed by his Foreign Minister personally to deliver a letter to the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the subject of a programme, for which the latter's cooperation was requested, to establish Ecuador as a model for the implementation of the Declaration on the Right to Development. Resources were requested in support of Ecuador's National Plan, which reflected the Government's commitment to achieving objectives related to the right to development.

57. Ms. PALME welcomed the inclusion of information on the rights of the child in the school curriculum and, in general, the progress achieved during the course of the past year. However, persisting problems in the area of health, including the unexpectedly high infant mortality rate, could not be tolerated and called for gradual but concrete remedies in the context of poverty alleviation. Priority should perhaps be given, in the allocation of funding, to basic health and education, which benefited the entire population, in preference to higher education with its narrower focus.

58. Mrs. SARDENBERG welcomed the proposed Ecuadorian project for giving effect to the right to development, particularly since children would be the first to benefit. The advent of a new administration and the introduction of a new Constitution, in a context of strengthened democracy, offered a golden opportunity to demonstrate Ecuador's commitment to achieving the goals of the National Plan, giving priority to legislative reform, review of government structures and the provision of basic services. The Ecuadorian delegation's participation in the Committee's plenary session could serve as a catalyst for alerting the press and the general public to the plight of children. Ecuador had already equipped itself with a framework for action in the form of the National Plan, which identified numerous spheres of action, and the Committee looked forward to hearing the results.

59. Mrs. MBOI suggested that cooperation between national and local bodies and with NGOs active in the defence of children should be strengthened with a view to achieving the goals of the National Plan, particularly with reference to vulnerable children and those in difficult circumstances. She urged the Ecuadorian administration to seek international assistance in providing primary health care for all young people, including services for adolescents in the areas of family planning and drugs. She welcomed the proposed measures to combat child labour and the economic exploitation of both girls and boys.

60. Mrs. MOKHUANE called for further investigation into the suicide rate, particularly among young women, which some sources stated to be high. Preventive measures should be instituted where appropriate. Particular attention should be devoted to poverty alleviation programmes. The prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse should be investigated, particularly among street children, and the possibility examined of seeking technical assistance to combat the problem. Environmental concerns might be addressed to some extent by raising awareness among schoolchildren. Breastfeeding should be encouraged in order to reduce the level of infant mortality as a result of malnutrition.

61. Mr. RABAH felt that he had not gained a comprehensive understanding of the juvenile justice system and requested further information in written form from the Government or Ministry of Justice.

62. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO recommended that the definition of children should be harmonized in order to correct existing inconsistencies. Education was the driving force behind progress and therefore educational programmes should be strengthened with a view to reducing the school drop-out rate. She congratulated the delegation on the Foreign Minister's right to development initiative, which was important for all developing countries, and therefore deserved the fullest support in order to ensure that it was carried to a successful conclusion.

63. Mr. KOLOSOV commended the qualities of the head of the Ecuadorian delegation but regretted the absence of a representative at the ministerial level. The Ecuadorian report, although it had not adhered to the established guidelines, had identified problems frankly and outlined possible solutions, which assisted the Committee in gaining an insight into in the situation of children in the country. He hoped that the Ecuadorian delegation's first meeting with the Committee would generate discussion of child-related issues at all levels of society.

64. The CHAIRPERSON emphasized that Ecuador's participation in the Committee's plenary session was no mere bureaucratic exercise but constituted the first step in an ongoing process. Each country's situation was considered in the context of its individual possibilities and constraints, and not in comparison to others. The National Plan and the new Constitution covered many spheres relating to children and young people, and specific legislation could be enacted in those areas in which the latter did not go far enough. It appeared that one of the main challenges in implementing the recommendations of the National Plan was to change entrenched cultural attitudes which accepted child abuse.

65. Ecuador's next report would be due in five years' time and would offer an excellent opportunity to take stock of the achievements of the newly-elected Government. While it was regrettable that nobody at the policy-making level could be present, the Committee had every confidence that the head of the delegation would bring the Committee's recommendations to the attention of the appropriate authorities.

66. Mr. GALLEGOS CHIRIBOGA said that he was the first to regret the absence of the Minister for Social Welfare. However, he himself had been asked to participate in the session personally by the Foreign Minister and the President had expressed his particular interest in the outcome. It was stipulated in the National Human Rights Plan that the delegation's report and the Committee's recommendations must be communicated to all branches of Government, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, as well as to the general public. He undertook to ensure that in future the Committee would receive all the requisite information in time to allow its members to study it. He thanked the members for their commitment to improving the lot of children and for their concern regarding the children of Ecuador.

The meeting rose at 1.01 p.m.